

A
S E R M O N

Preached on the

S U N D A Y

Preceding the

F A S T - D A Y,

F E B R U A R Y I I, 1757,

In PREPARATION to that

F A S T.

By JOSEPH GREENHILL, M. A.
Rector of East Horsley and East Clandon, in Surrey.



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*a wretched performance and bears
no connexion with the text prefix'd.*

ROM. X. I.—

*Brethren, my Heart's Desire and
Prayer to God for Israel is, that
they might be saved.*



ABOUT this Time Twelvemonths
there was a general and public
Fast appointed by the King, to
be observed here in this Kingdom
in a most devout and solemn Manner, upon
Account of the most dreadful, and the most
extensive Earthquake, that probably ever
was, and partly felt here; and upon Account
of the then Situation of Public Affairs (as to
the Issue of them) of highest Importance.
This important Situation of Public Affairs
hath as yet not had a prosperous Issue; and
now there is another general and solemn Fast
appointed by the same Royal Authority, to

be observed upon Account of the War with the *French* King. Our most blessed Lord and Saviour confirmed the Duty of Fasting, as an occasional Duty of Christians, in order to, and as an Indication of, their humbling themselves for their Sins under the afflicting and correcting Hand of God. This Duty our Lord and Saviour requires to be performed by us in Sincerity: "And if we have any Love for our Country, this will move us, on the appointed Fast, in solemn Devotion and due Humiliation, to offer up our Heart's Desires, Supplications, and Prayers, for our Country; beseeching Almighty God, that he would vouchsafe to avert deserved Judgments from it; to bless his Majesty's Arms both by Sea and by Land; that its Peace may be restored, and that its Safety and Prosperity may be perpetuated. In thus expressing your Love for your Country in the dangerous Situation it is in, you follow the Example of the holy Apostle St. *Paul*."

WITH the Welfare of your Country your own particular Welfare is strongly and generally connected; and when it is, any how, deeply involved and entangled in Sin, and
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in its Consequence, Misery, then Grief should teach us all the Concern that, at present, you will have for your Country,; will be in Proportion to the Love you bear it, and the Dangers and Evils it is threatened with. But as threatened and purposed Evils of a long and ruinous War, and of other public Troubles and Afflictions, will be graciously averted from us, upon our sincere Repentance, by the Hand of Almighty God, according to his most gracious Promises; so to move you to such Sincerity, I shall speak of what hath been the Consequence of the dangerous Situation we are in, where Men have not repented; noting in what they have trusted, and shewing how vain their Confidence hath been; first reminding you of this certain Truth, that *the Ruin of every Nation that hath been destroyed hath come from itself*, (though it hath been long before great and powerful Nations have brought themselves down to the last Period of their Destruction) yet irreligious and deceitful Historians, descanting on past Facts with their glossing Lies, have taught their weak Readers to imagine, That a People's Prosperity and Safety hath depended on this or that Turn in their Affairs,

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on some notable Feat of some Warrior or other, or the Stratagem of some wise Politician or other; and that a Nation's Ruin hath come from the destructive Ways and Means that this or that Usurper hath been led into, or by those violent Means he hath been drove to; or by the Oppression and Cruelty of this or that arbitrary or irreligious Tyrant; or brought to its Ruin by the sought-for Aid, or Invasion of Foreigners. The Prophet *Hosea* told his Countrymen otherwise, declaring *this Truth* unto them in these express Words: *O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself*. And if we will learn from holy Scripture to look on History, the Register of Actions past, and will make due and true Observations thereon, we shall see that Almighty God hath always been to a righteous, or to a repenting People, a Shield and Buckler in their Defence against their Enemies; and in the Ruin and Destruction of a rebellious and impenitent Nation, we shall see that the Vain and Wicked, in the wanton Dissipation, the extravagant Waste and Spoil of a Country's Wealth that they committed in Times of Peace; and in the Ravages and Havocks that they made in
Times

Times of War, were but a Sword in the Hand of a just, good, and merciful God. In whatever Countries where Wars have been ended and crowned with happy Success, and true and lasting Peace, there have been these Circumstances attending them: The People of those Countries have been Men of Sense, Men of Property, and Men of Religion too; and, as such, they have readily and willingly served their Princes, according to their Capacities, in their just and necessary Wars, in Defence of their Property; and to this Purpose they have left their Wives, and their Families, and their ordinary Business, and betook themselves to Arms in the Service of their Country; and at the End of the Wars, as far as was practicable, have returned to their peaceable Professions, honest Industry and chearful Diligence; Sobriety, Temperance, and Moderation; dutiful Obedience to Magistrates for Conscience Sake; filial, parental, and conjugal Affections; the Love of Kindred and Neighbourhood, and of generous and cordial Friendship. Where these are, there a Nation stands glorious, and exalted in Righteousness above the common Level of the World. Such a People have
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proved fit Instruments, in Time of War, to correct the injurious Enemies of their native Land, and have blessed their Country by their virtuous Valour. Some such Times past Christianity hath afforded, in this dark and miserable World; but the Consequences of War are, at all Times, and in general so sad, that *Peace* is ever the Desire of all Men, except of those high, fierce and fiery Spirits who are mad after Conquest, or of those base and vile Men, who are keen and hungry after Plunder, and whom disuse of Business and Labour hath rendered unwilling to earn their Livelihood peaceably, by following any honest Calling and Station in Life. War in holy Scripture is described as a ravenous Bird, swift to fly at, armed with strong Talons to seize, and a bloody Beak to tear, and a hungry Stomach to devour its Prey. Notwithstanding it is thus, yet with what unaccountable Infatuation have some wicked Nations defiled with sacred and innocent Blood, and loaded with Offences most abominable in the Sight of God, deceived themselves, when they have been long and most visibly threatened with War, under its worse Circumstances. Some of the worse and most
dangerous

dangerous Circumstances of War seem to be these: Where an Army hath been long mewed up, and trained to fly at its Prey; such an Army, when it hath been set in Motion by some intestine Spring, or when it hath wanted foreign Prey, hath always preyed on its own Country. The honourable Profession of Arms among Christians (as may be proved from past Christianity) hath not been looked upon as a slavish Trade for Life, but as an occasional Service of a Man's King and Country.

ANOTHER bad Circumstance of War threatening Destruction to a Country, is when an Army is much made up of Men of bad Principles, such as have wasted in Riot their own Property and Substance, and have no Regard for their own Families; for an Army is not a Place likely to alter Men's Principles from bad to good; and Men will ever act according to their Principles, whenever they come to have an Opportunity. Where Men have not feared and dreaded such Armies, they must have put their Confidence in the Wisdom and in the Goodness of the Leaders of those Armies, imagining that they always could, and likewise that

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they always would, restrain them from committing Oppressions and Outrages. There is a most remarkable Instance of the Groundlessness of all over-weaning Confidence in the Leaders of Armies, recorded in holy Scripture, in the Person of *Haseel*, a great and principal Officer of the King of *Syria*, and who afterwards rose to be King thereof: For *Elisha* being shewn the Wars and Troubles wherewith his Country should be afflicted, and weeping upon Account thereof in the Presence of this *Haseel*, he very kindly and humanely asked *Elisha* the Cause of his weeping; and the Prophet told him the Cause thereof, saying, "Because I know
 " the Evil that thou wilt do unto the Children
 " of *Israel*; their Strong-holds wilt thou set
 " on Fire, and their young Men wilt thou
 " slay with the Sword, and wilt dash their
 " Children, and rip up their Women with
 " Child. And *Haseel* said, But what is
 " thy Servant a Dog, that he should do this
 " great thing?" It appears by *Haseel's* Reply to, and Resentment of, what *Elisha* told him, that he was a Man of some Generosity and Humanity, of some superficial Goodness; but by what he turned out, that he was at Bottom a vain and wicked Man. It is dreadful

ful to see from History, how Men of some apparent Virtue and Goodness, through the Incidents of War, have proceeded from one Step of Cruelty to another; and how little Trust is to be put in Man; and what a Curse those People have ever in the End endured, "who have put their Trust in Man, and taken Man for their Defence, and in their Hearts gone from the Lord." We are agoing in our appointed Supplications and Prayers, to make this Acknowledgment to the Lord God of our Salvation, that "we confide not in the Splendor of any thing that is great, nor in the Stability of any thing that is strong here below." I pray God for Jesus Christ's Sake to give us his Grace, that we may evidence by our Deeds that this Acknowledgment comes not only from our Lips, but from our Hearts too.

ANOTHER bad and dangerous Circumstance attending the War of any Country, and which hath generally proved destructive thereto, is when they have invited and called into their Aid and Defence, an armed Body of Foreigners, receiving them into, and keeping them in, the Heart of their Country.

There are many obvious Reasons that bespeak how ill grounded such Confidence is; so that we may well wonder how any Nation could ever thus have laid hold of so weak a Twig: But where Men turn their Eyes from the clear Light of Truth, Error ever confounds their Sight with its dazzling Blazes and Appearances; and those Countries which have been undone by the calling in of a foreign Army in this Manner, must have imagined that a Number of such armed Foreigners hath shewn their Enemies their Power; how that they came as true Allies and Friends to a Country; would not have turned out its Enemies; and how that as they were called in only upon a Pinch, and for a little while, this End obtained, they would have returned home, the Love of their native Land inducing them hereto. The least due Reflection will suffice to shew why the thus trusting to Foreigners is but the trusting to a broken Staff, that goes into, and pierces the Hand of those that lean thereon; for the calling thus of armed Foreigners into a Country, in Fact, bespeaks that the Country that calls them in is weak or divided, and so is rather an Invitation for other Foreigners to try to come and invade it.

it. Though Foreigners come as true Allies and Friends, yet their Friendship cannot be very strong, being destitute of all those Ties which are between Men of the same Country; the Jealousies with which they have been naturally received, and the Affronts with which they have been treated, must have often turned such Friends into Enemies. When States have been reduced thus to call in an armed Body of Foreigners among them into their Country, fresh Exigencies must have often risen besides those that were the Occasions of their calling them in, inducing those that called them in to keep them in; so the Love such Foreigners have had for their native Land, and their Desire to return home thereto, hath been abated, by Change of Climate and Way of living; and where such Change hath been any wise for the better, such Foreigners could not have returned Home to their former Manner of living, without very great Difficulty. Thus I have endeavoured to offer to your Reflection the sad Situation of Countries that have been undone by War: Now if you see any Resemblances in our present Situation of Affairs, look on those Resemblances with the Eye of that Charity, which directeth

directeth us to *bear, believe, hope, and endure all things*, in a seemly Manner, in dutiful Submission to the Will of God, who hath taught and commanded us to do good, and to extend our Love much farther than to those who are disposed to love or to do good to us.

BESIDES what may occur to your Thoughts from what I have mentioned, I will remind you of this, that there are two sorts of Men apt to deceive themselves more than ordinary in troublesome Times; the Rich and the Poor: Rich Men strengthen themselves in their Riches, that they have many Dependents, and that they have laid many under Obligations to them; poor Men comfort themselves in their low Situation, hoping that the Storm will not blow on, but over them. Indeed generally, in ordinary troublesome Times, poor Men are safe if they meddle not; but when the Storm of tempestuous Times beats with the greatest Violence, no Man is safe, it then comes to be *as with the Lender so with the Borrower*. The only true Allay and Cordial for the Troubles Men suffer and endure, and are liable to, here in this unstable World, is their hopeful Prospect of their Happiness
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in the next; and that we should not in a longing and lingering Manner set our Affections on things in Earth, but set our Affections on those things in Heaven, to which we are redeemed; the continual passing Forms and changing Scenes of human Affairs, from prosperous to troublesome Times, are often in holy Scripture set before our View; and even the Calms of prosperous Times are no more without their Inconveniences to mortal Man, than the Storms of troublesome Times; and, in general, that may be affirmed of wicked Nations which is affirmed of wicked and ungrateful Men, that *their Prosperity hath destroyed them.*

ST. Paul, when he made this Declaration, that his *Heart's Desire and Prayer to God for Israel was, that they might be saved,* bore some Record of their Zeal of God: The Record that some very learned, worthy, and eminent Men have borne of the State of Religion here in this Country, affords but the saddest Prospect; and probably the State of Religion is not much better in any other Country. Our Lord by his prophetic Question about the State of Faith at his coming, foretells that the Divine Goodness, Long-suffering,

suffering, and Patience with Men, should come at last to be so abused and slighted, that there should scarcely be found Faith in his Mediation for Man's Redemption; yet surely we may hope, that the Light of the Gospel, the Day of these last Times of this World is not so far spent and gone, and the dark tempestuous Clouds so fast rising and gathering which will obscure its Eve, especially that the People of *this reformed Country* are not so far turned from the Way of Truth into that of Deceit and Darkness, but that there are many *Corneliuses*, many devout Soldiers in the Army, *whose Prayers are heard, and whose Alms are had in Remembrance in the Sight of God*; for neither the Prayers, nor Alms, nor Arms of a few such, can save a wicked, impenitent, and unrelenting People; those Crimes scandalously and publicly committed, which have destroyed former Nations, must and will destroy this, unless by Repentance and Amendment the foul Stain and Pollution be done away.

By what I have said unto you in this Discourse, I would be your faithful, your Christian Monitor, as is my Duty, in the
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Ways of everlasting Peace. I would have you duly forewarned, not amazingly alarmed; such Alarms belong to the Guilty and Impenitent, and hurry them from one false temporary Remedy to another; though it is better, when in Danger, thus to be alarmed, than not to be alarmed at all: But I would lead you from Hope to Hope; so that if the Times should take such a sad Turn, that you should have little or no Prospect of a Releasement in them, you might have a well-grounded Hope of a happy and glorious Releasement out of them, submitting to God's Will, and trusting to his Goodness, as of a most gracious God, whose tender Mercies are at all Times over all his Works, and who is ever nigh to help all those that call upon him faithfully. It is the special Duty of Ministers of the Gospel to take Care not to flatter a People under *their manifold Provocations, most justly deserving heavy Judgments,* with a Prospect of any Peace from any Turn or Change in their temporal Affairs; such vain Prospects offered to their View tendeth but to harden them; such Change of Posture can no more cure a diseased People, than the turning from Side to Side can cure a sick

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Man : A wicked and impenitent People are like foul Water ; in the calm and peaceable Times they stagnate, ferment, and corrupt, and in the Storms of War stir up their Filth and Mire. I speak not this any how in the least to abate your Heart's ardent Desires and Prayers to Almighty God, who disposes of Kingdoms, who turns and rules the Hearts of Kings, for that happy State to your Country, the State of Peace, but only to shew that *there is no Peace to the Wicked ; they are like the troubled Sea, when it cannot rest.* The best Intentions, the most open and generous Treatment, that the wisest and best Prince on Earth can rule a People with, cannot bring Peace, Prosperity, and Safety, unless there is in the People a Love of Virtue and Religion in the Way of Truth, and Righteousness towards whom such Treatment is offered, as well as in the Prince it comes from. May Almighty God by his Grace direct our Hearts and Minds, as of those enlightened by the Word of his revealed Will, to such Thoughts and Dispositions as will best fit and prepare us duly to observe the appointed Fast ; and grant, that by leading the Remainder of our Lives in the Way of Truth

Truth and Righteousness, we may shew that we are Servants of the true and living God, who hath made known to us that he hath not required, nor will receive an hypocritical, a mere external Fast ; but that the Nation who will acceptably fast to him, must

“ loose the Bands of Wickedness ; undo the
 “ heavy Burdens ; let the oppressed go free,
 “ and break every Yoke ; deal their Bread
 “ to the Hungry, and bring the Poor that
 “ are cast out to their Houses ; when they
 “ see the Naked, that they cover him, and
 “ that they hide not themselves from their
 “ own Flesh.” When such a generous or charitable Behaviour in our Lives towards all Men, comes out of a pure Heart, and of a good Conscience, and of Faith unfeigned, we answer the End of the Commandment, or Law that we are under, that of *the Gospel* ; and when a People do thus, their “ Light
 “ breaketh forth as the Morning, and their
 “ Health, Peace, and Prosperity, spring
 “ forth speedily :” And that it may be thus with us here of this Land, God of his infinite Mercy and Goodness grant, for Jesus Christ’s Sake ; in whose Name, and through whose Mediation and Intercession, we can
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only ask, and hope to obtain it; and to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, three Persons, and one God, be ascribed all Mercy and Goodness, all Glory and Honour, all Power, Might, Majesty, and Dominion, both now and for evermore: *Amen.*

F I N I S.

